

NETWORKS

FAQ

Q Do I need a display on my router?

A While it's not essential to have a display on your router, it can be handy if you spend a lot of time changing settings. Belkin's N1 Vision (reviewed opposite) is the first wireless router to have a display, and it means you can access settings and information via the router without having to use a web browser.

Being able to change settings directly is a benefit, especially since the N1 Vision has a separate SSID for guests. This means the screen can show the network name that guests should look for in their list of available networks to which they can connect. It's also easy to see which devices are connected at any time, so you'll know if any unauthorised devices are connected.

Having a display on your router is a good thing, and we expect more manufacturers to follow suit soon.

Matt Smith

Notebooks and networks expert

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FON La Fonera+

★★★★★

€43 (around £30 inc VAT)
From www.fon.com

Fon is a relatively new company with a radical attitude towards wireless routers. The idea is that once you've bought a La Fonera+, you are a 'Fonero' and can get free WiFi access wherever you are in the world by logging on to another user's La Fonera+ (a Fon Spot).

La Fonera+ isn't really a wireless router, though, but a glorified access point. Like the Belkin N1 Vision (opposite), it broadcasts two SSIDs. One is for your own private use, the other for other Fon members to use when they are within the wireless range.

You can log on to another user's La Fonera+ simply by entering your Fon username and password on the holding page, which appears when you connect to the wireless network. Non-Foneros can also use any Fon Spot by buying passes from Fon, which gives them credit for a certain amount of usage. Fon Spot owners can choose to receive some of the money Fon receives from the sale of passes. In the UK, BT has teamed up with Fon to provide coverage for the whole of the UK. You can check www.fon.com to find a map of Fon Spots around the globe.

Many people are already using the system.

We found several connections near Shopper's office in central London and headed out to test five of them. We couldn't connect to three of the signals, though. They were shown on the map as being available within the previous hour, but none appeared on our wireless networks list when we visited the locations. The two Fon Spots we could connect to, however, were stable, provided decent transfer speeds and were perfectly suitable for checking email and web browsing.



The device itself is tiny (measuring 70x93x26mm) and has two Ethernet ports: one to connect to your broadband modem or existing router, and one for a wired connection to a PC. It supports only 802.11g, which is limited to 54Mbit/s, and the weedy standard antenna provided poor coverage. However, for an extra £1.35 you can get a high-gain aerial (La Fontenna) when you order. This is an essential upgrade if you want to attract Foneros, as Fon claims it will boost signal coverage by five times.

Installation is ridiculously easy. There's no software; you just find the wireless signal and connect wirelessly.

The near and far transfer speeds were decent for 802.11g, and the throughput of 3.14Mb/s at 25m is fast enough for checking email and web browsing. It's a shame there isn't a Draft-N version, though.

The concept is good in theory, but when you're in rural areas the chances of being near a Fon Spot without making a special journey are low. However, the La Fonera+ is still a decent piece of kit at an attractive price.

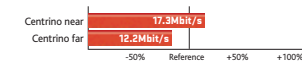
Matt Smith

SUMMARY

- ✓ Decent speed at 25m
- ✓ Share WiFi with other users
- ✗ Limited to 802.11g transfer speeds

WIRELESS ROUTER 802.11g (54Mbit/s),
1x 10/100 Ethernet port, WAN port
PART CODE FON2201A
DETAILS www.fon.com

PERFORMANCE (see page 66)



Also consider...

BUFFALO WBM-R-G125

★★★★★

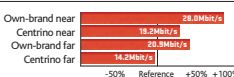
£48 inc VAT
From www.lamda-tek.com



It may be 802.11g, not Draft-N, but the Buffalo WBM-R-G125 provides fantastic speeds for a very low price. It's also simple to configure, taking just a few minutes. The Buffalo CardBus adaptor will improve your speeds further and costs a mere £18 extra. Its throughput at 25m also rivals some more expensive Draft-N routers.



WIRELESS ROUTER 802.11g (125Mbit/s), 4x 10/100 Ethernet ports, WAN Port (ADSL2+ modem), UPnP, QoS
PART CODE WBM-R-G125
DETAILS www.buffalotech.com
✓ Good wireless speed; inexpensive; automatic security
FULL REVIEW Nov 2007



LINKSYS WAG325N Wireless-N ADSL Gateway

★★★★★

£80 inc VAT
From www.lamda-tek.com

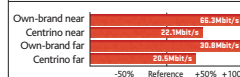


Linksys's WAG325N Wireless-N ADSL

Gateway managed the fastest transfer rates we've ever seen from wireless kit in our tests, and its range was excellent, too. Centrino performance was equally impressive, and we had no trouble connecting at 25m. This router was simple to set up and configure, and it's excellent value.



WIRELESS ADSL ROUTER Draft 802.11n (300Mbit/s), 4x 10/100 Ethernet ports, WAN port (ADSL2+ modem), UPnP, QoS
PART CODE WAG325N
SUPPLIER www.lamda-tek.com
DETAILS www.uk.linksys.com
✓ Excellent range; stunning throughput
✗ Adaptor client software not Vista-compliant
FULL REVIEW Sep 2007





BELKIN N1 Vision

★★★★★

£101 inc VAT
From www.lambda-tek.com

Belkin's N1 Vision is the latest wireless router designed to be a stylish object in your home. It stands proudly upright with a sleek glossy finish and, uniquely for a router, has an informative screen. Belkin's intention is that, once configured, you shouldn't have to use the router's web interface at all; everything can be controlled using the screen and buttons. The screen can be set to display your current upstream and downstream speeds, connected devices (and their speeds), usage over the past 24 hours, or just the time and date. It's a great idea that beats other routers hands down.

Installation couldn't be simpler; a two-page booklet explains how to make all the connections. A CD is included, but Belkin recommends you use the web interface's installation wizard instead. It's very user-friendly, taking only a moment or two to enter your ISP details.

Once the N1 Vision is switched on, it takes a minute or so before the router is ready to use. While transfer speeds were average in our close-range tests, the throughput of 11.15Mbit/s was impressive at our 25m location, and it managed 16.53Mbit/s with Belkin's Draft-N CardBus card. The Vision supports WEP, WPA and WPA2 encryption, and it also has a demilitarised zone (DMZ) and supports WiFi Protected Setup. It is unique in providing two SSIDs, so you can grant access to guests on a limited basis while still allowing full access for your own devices.

The N1 Vision costs more than a lot of Draft-N routers we've seen, but the extra expense is justified by the useful display and four-port Gigabit switch. This version doesn't include an ADSL modem, but Belkin tells us one should be on sale in early 2008. This will make it the first router to have a Gigabit switch and built-in ADSL 2+ modem, so if you can hang on until then it should be worth waiting for.

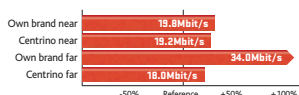
Matt Smith

SUMMARY

- ☒ Excellent speeds at 25m
- ☒ Very useful display
- ☒ No modem built-in; expensive

WIRELESS ROUTER Draft 802.11n (300Mbit/s), 4x 10/100/1,000 Ethernet ports, WAN port, QoS, UPnP
PART CODE F5D8232-4
DETAILS www.belkin.com/uk

PERFORMANCE (see page 66)



LEVELONE WBR-6000 N One

★★★

£84 inc VAT
From www.broadbandbuyer.co.uk

LevelOne is a relatively new brand to the UK, and this is the first time we've seen one of its products. The WBR-6000 N One is a stylish-looking Draft-N wireless router with a black plastic chassis and orange and white detail. The three antennas are on the side of the router instead of the rear. This seems odd, but it means you can have your router on a rack or shelving unit with the antennas still exposed, rather than tucked away. It's a sturdy unit that should be able to resist a knock or two.

Installation was simple. The CD-based configuration wizard took us through the ISP, wireless and security settings in a few minutes. The manual is very helpful and includes all the necessary information about the router and how to make the right physical connections. There's also a paper version of the quick setup guide to refer to as you choose your settings on the screen.

Transfer speeds with a Centrino notebook were on a par with most Draft-N routers we've seen recently. We have seen Draft-N routers that can't establish a connection at our 25m range with Centrino, but the N One managed 2.86Mbit/s, which would be fast enough for web browsing and email.

Transfer speeds using LevelOne's £46 WPC-600 CardBus adaptor were faster but, again, the results were average for a Draft-N router. At 25m, the WBR-6000 achieved 5.53Mbit/s, a disappointing result compared to other Draft-N routers.

This is a decent router with reasonable throughput, but £84 is a lot to spend for this level of performance. Linksys's WAG325N ADSL Gateway (see 'Also consider...' opposite) costs a few pounds less and outperformed the N One in all our tests. It achieved a very respectable 5.75Mbit/s at 25m with our Centrino notebook and a whopping 66.3Mbit/s at near range with Linksys's own CardBus card.

Matt Smith

SUMMARY

- ☒ Simple installation
- ☒ Expensive for its performance
- ☒ Other Draft-N routers are faster

WIRELESS ROUTER Draft 802.11n (300Mbit/s), 4 x 10/100 Ethernet ports, WAN port
PART CODE WBR-6000
DETAILS www.levelone.eu

PERFORMANCE (see page 66)



EDIMAX Signal Detector/ USB WiFi Adaptor

★★★

£23 inc VAT
From www.overclock.co.uk

Edimax's Signal Detector can detect wireless network signals wherever you go, allowing you to use free wireless internet or the service you're signed up to where possible. Measuring 90x27x13mm, it's light, pocket-sized and means you don't have to boot up your notebook just to see if WiFi is available.

Pressing the detect switch at the back prompts the Signal Detector to search for networks. It presents the results as the number of unprotected networks and the number of encrypted ones on a small LED screen. You can scroll through the list of available networks, starting with the unencrypted signals, to locate the one you may have a credit with or the store or venue to which you are the nearest.

It works well, but the Signal Detector doesn't update automatically as you move around; you have to keep pressing the detect button to refresh the list. In less-populated areas, where WiFi may not be common, this will become tiring. It can detect only 802.11b or 802.11g networks; Draft-N is not supported. The power switch sticks a bit, but it's a robust device nonetheless. You can charge the Signal Detector via USB, and the fully charged battery lasted for around 16 hours in our tests.

The stick also functions as an 802.11b/g USB wireless adaptor, supporting WEP, WPA and WPA2 encryption. With most other companies making Draft-N devices at the moment, producing an 802.11b/g adaptor seems like a backwards step. Throughput was poor for 802.11g, failing to break the 10Mbit/s barrier. We couldn't establish a connection with our test router at 25m; we could with a standard Centrino wireless adaptor.

We'd suggest using the Signal Detector for what it does best, which is finding WiFi, and investing in a decent Draft-N CardBus or USB adaptor. Linksys's Wireless-N adaptor (reviewed in *Shopper* December 2007) costs £48 and offers better speed and coverage.

Matt Smith

SUMMARY

- ☒ Detect WiFi without a laptop
- ☒ No Draft-N detection
- ☒ Doesn't update automatically

WIRELESS NETWORK FINDER/USB WIRELESS ADAPTOR 802.11g (54Mbit/s)
PART CODE EW-7317LDg
DETAILS www.edimax.com

PERFORMANCE (see page 66)

